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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, November 13, 2007

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WARREN

Baby dies; mom's boyfriend held

Detroit charged with neglect, too

November 13, 2007

BY CHRISTINA HALL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 20-year-old Detroit man is to be arraigned today, accused of killing his live-in girlfriend's 14-month-old son during an incident at their Warren apartment.

The man, whom police declined to identify until he is formally arraigned, is charged with open murder and first-degree child neglect. He was being held without bond Monday in the Macomb County Jail pending arraignment in 37th District Court in Warren, Warren police Detective Daniel Klik said.

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Kameron Morosky had internal bleeding and internal abdominal injuries, Macomb County Medical Examiner Daniel Spitz said.

Klik declined comment on how the injuries occurred until after the arraignment, but said "an interview with the boyfriend reveals that the death was a direct result of his actions" and was not accidental.

Police were called to the Center Line Gardens apartment complex, 28490 Mound Road, about 3:30 p.m. Thursday after the boyfriend said the baby had stopped breathing.

Kameron was taken to St. John Macomb Hospital, where he was pronounced dead less than an hour later, Klik said.

The detective said Kameron's mother was working and not home at the time of the incident. The boyfriend, who is not the baby's father, was taking care of Kameron while the mother was at work.

The boyfriend was taken into custody without incident Friday at the police station after police requested that he come in, Klik said.

If convicted, the boyfriend could receive life in prison on the murder charge and 15 years on the child neglect charge, Klik said.

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Find this article at:

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DETROIT

Boys in stolen car crash after high-speed chase

Teens are held in juvenile detention

November 13, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Three Detroit teenagers are in juvenile detention on charges of leading Grosse Pointe police on a high-speed chase Sunday afternoon, ending in a crash outside a Detroit bakery.

The boys, all 16, were spotted in a stolen car driving 44 m.p.h. in a 30 m.p.h. zone at Mack and Yorkshire by Grosse Pointe officers, who tried to make a traffic stop. The car sped off down Mack at an estimated 80 m.p.h. before crashing into two newspaper boxes on the sidewalk outside Verdonckt's Belgium Bakery at Mack and Maryland in Detroit.

Advertisement

Police said the newspaper boxes were launched through the front window of the bakery and crashed into two refrigerator units. No one was injured, but police estimated the damage at \$10,000.

The driver was charged with fleeing and eluding police and driving a stolen car; the passengers are charged with possession of a stolen motor vehicle.

All three tested positive for marijuana when they were admitted to the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility.

The driver's bond was set at \$10,000, the others at \$1,500. They face a pretrial hearing Nov. 26.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

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TRIUMPHS

Domestic violence survivor finds a new home, purpose

She helps others as she was helped

November 13, 2007

BY KORIE WILKINS

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Reneé Shorter's new home in Pontiac, with its large windows, sunny kitchen and dozens of green plants, typifies her outlook: It's open and full of life.

For Shorter, a receptionist at Comcast and a motivational speaker, the house -- her first -- is a dream come true. After more than 30 years of pain, abuse and violence, she is happy and fulfilled, writing a book about how people can let go of the past and live in the present.

Advertisement

"It was a long process," said Shorter, 44.

Shorter was the first person to get a home through Habitat for Humanity of Oakland County's new program with HAVEN, an organization that works to stop domestic violence. She moved in Sept. 26.

She went to HAVEN for counseling about 10 years ago and stayed involved, eventually becoming a speaker.

As a child, Shorter suffered physical and emotional abuse in her family and went on to an abusive relationship while in her 30s. Through it all, Shorter says, she didn't tell anyone. Not the police, not friends, not family.

She eventually got the courage to leave that relationship and started going to church and counseling at HAVEN, which is based in Oakland County.

"And here I am today," she said. "That's when I started living my new life."

She now speaks to church groups, schools and others about her experience.

"I'm the mouthpiece," she said. "I'm going to talk for the men and women who can't talk for themselves, who are being abused."

Her time at HAVEN led her to Habitat for Humanity and her 1,200-square-foot dream home. The program seeks to match domestic violence survivors who meet Habitat for Humanity's criteria for receiving new homes.

"We give people a hand up, not a handout," said Sally LePla, executive director of Habitat for Humanity of Oakland County. "And Reneé is amazing. She's an incredible advocate for everything she gets involved in."

To get the house, Shorter raised a \$1,000 down payment and put in 300 hours of work -- driving in nails, painting and laying floor. She had to qualify through income and previous substandard housing, LePla said. Shorter owns the home, pays a mortgage and is responsible for taxes and upkeep.

Shorter, who attends Greater Grace Temple in Detroit, said her faith helps her through tough times. She says she's "incredibly blessed," and gestures to her new home.

"I want to help people," she said. "That's my purpose in life."

Contact **KORIE WILKINS** at 248-351-5186 or kwilkins@freepress.com.

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Article published Nov 13, 2007

GUEST COLUMNIST

Money intended to help poor children should not be diverted

With health care for our families and children so important, it is very disappointing that many Washington and Lansing politicians are playing politics with the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), a program that was started in 1997 by Republicans to provide health care to children in low-income families.

These politicians and their special interest groups are claiming in television ads, radio ads, robocalls and press releases that I do not want children to have health care. This could not be further from the truth.

My wife and I know what it is like to struggle, as we could not afford health insurance in my early years as a pastor. I am fully committed to making quality health insurance more affordable and available to Michigan's working families and poor children.

My position is very clear: I believe money meant to help poor children should go to poor children and not be diverted to cover families already on private health insurance earning \$60,000 a year, illegal immigrants or childless adults.

I have co-sponsored and voted for legislation to renew SCHIP, so poor children currently receiving health coverage will continue to receive care. The Democratic leadership has forced us to vote on three additional SCHIP bills this year.

In total, these bills would have moved two million children from private to government health insurance; covered families earning up to \$83,000 a year; raised taxes on every private health insurance plan; reduced Medicare benefits for 14,183 seniors in the 7th District; given illegal immigrants the benefits; reduced access to prescribed oxygen equipment and wheelchairs for senior citizens; harmed home health care services, nursing facilities and inpatient rehabilitation services; and required 22 million new smokers over the next 10 years to pay for the program.

Clearly, these bills were about more than providing health care to poor children, and I refused to go along with the majority's misguided attempt to overextend the program.

I am trying to work with Democrats on this issue, and recently I introduced an alternative children's health insurance bill with my House and Senate colleagues. Our bill would renew coverage for all children currently receiving coverage, and provide health insurance tax credits so parents can buy private health insurance for their kids. Sadly, the response has been more attack ads against me and further spreading of false information. These folks seem far more interested in scoring political points than helping Michigan children.

State Sen. Mark Schauer recently joined the fray in a Nov. 8 op-ed on this page. He claimed "illegal immigrants will not be allowed to receive this benefit." According to Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue, this is false. Additionally, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office read the Democrats' bill and said \$3.7 billion will go to illegal immigrants.

Sen. Schauer also claimed the most recent bill caps "coverage at 300 percent of poverty." The bill allows families earning above \$62,000 to receive government health insurance by allowing states to disregard types of income, such as income paid for rent, transportation or food. Surprise, surprise, politicians playing numbers games to push more people into government health care.

I recognize that Sen. Schauer has been busy raising taxes on the people of Michigan, but he and his special interest allies should get their facts straight so we can have a fruitful public policy debate about how best ensure poor children and working families have access to health care.

U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg, R-Tipton, represents the 7th District in the U.S. House of Representatives.



Food giveaway planned

Hometown Headlines

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, November 11, 2007

Journal Staff Writer

FLINT - Free food will be given away while supplies last beginning at 11 a.m. Thursday at Central Assembly Pentecostal Church of God, 2014 Zimmerman St.

The event is sponsored by the church and Crossover, Downtown Outreach Ministries.

- George Jaksa

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Cadillac News

November 13, 2007

Salvation Army food drive pick up Saturday

Leave all Ed Kellogg Salvation Army food drive bags on your front porch by 9:30 a.m. Saturday.

Salvation Army ran out of bags this year, so they handed out some of last year's bags, which had the wrong date printed on them. This has created confusion for some community members.

Salvation Army in Cadillac is collecting non-perishable foods to fill Thanksgiving baskets for the needy. If you'd like to donate food to the drive, either leave your bag on your front porch on Saturday or drop off at Cadillac's Salvation Army, 725 Wright Street. For more information, contact Capt. Jeff Eddy of Salvation Army at 775-7131.



11/09/2007

Public can adopt a pantry baby

STACY LANGLEY , The Huron Daily Tribune

BAD AXE — The joys of parenting are endless — and so is the list of items parents need to take care of their bundle of joy.

A local non-profit organization known as the Huron County Baby Pantry has been working since 2004 to try to ease the day to day worries many area parents have. Peggy Pitcher, pantry volunteer, said the Huron County Baby Pantry has been a local source for parents of young children who are finding it hard in today's economy to make end's meet when they have a little one to care for at home.

Recently Pitcher came up with an idea that would get the community involved while raising funds to help area babies in need.

Pitcher said the pantry is offering the community a unique chance to adopt a pantry baby.

Pitcher's mom, Judy Horton, has been making hand-sewn dolls, while Pitcher helps with blankets. For a donation of \$45 made to the pantry, donors will get one of Horton's dolls to take home. The money donated will go toward a pantry child. For each doll that is adopted, a child who is signed up with the pantry will get two cans of formula, two packages of baby wipes, 10 jars of baby food, 24 diapers, two boxes of cereal and hygiene products.

"We can really make their \$45 go a long way in helping these parents," Pitcher said. "Every little bit helps. And we thought this project was nice because it offers people a chance to get something nice to remember their generosity by. "Each doll is different and has the first name of a child from our pantry." Pitcher said the hand-made dolls are 13 inches long and all have hand-made clothes, diaper and a blanket.

Aside from this project, the Huron County Baby Pantry offers everything from baby formula and diapers to mittens and clothes to parents who live in Huron County and have a child under the age of 5. Parents are able to stop in and pick up items they need to get by without any cost to them. All items are purchased through donations and grants.

"There are no income requirements (for parents)," Pitcher said. "We feel if they are coming to us for help we want to be there to give it to them. We're not meant to provide everything parents need. What we try to do is to be the stop-gap to help them out in between pay checks. Our purpose is and always has been to stop child abuse by easing parents' burdens."

The baby pantry is open twice a month — the second Wednesday of each month and the fourth Saturday of each month. The pantry is located on North Hanselman Street in Bad Axe.

To adopt a Huron County Baby Pantry doll contact Pitcher at (989) 872-8023. They also are available at the Bad Axe District Library or Thumb Office Supply.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Heating costs to go up steeply

Price of oil rises 25.5%, propane 22%

Monday, November 12, 2007

BY JO COLLINS MATHIS

The Ann Arbor News

For some, the price of winter heating just went up.

Although experts say the cost of heating a home in Michigan using gas and electricity will likely be about the same as last year, the price of heating oil and propane has increased substantially.

According to the Energy Information Administration's Nov. 6 report, heating oil prices this winter in the Midwest will rise 25.5 percent, while the cost of propane will rise 22 percent.

"Even though (the price of heating oil) has increased every year for some time now, this increase is bigger than I think people expected," said Webster Township farm owner Tom Bloomer.

Bloomer said he buys oil two or three times each year in 400-gallon increments. The oil price hike means it will cost him around \$1,300 to restock his supply, up \$300 over last year.

Two major local providers of gas and electric heat say residents should expect their bills to be in line with last year's costs.

"Because of Michigan's geology, we're able to store vast quantities of natural gas," said DTE Energy spokesman Scott Simons. "We keep gas prices as low as possible by storing large quantities of natural gas. This enables us to take advantage of seasonal pricing and acquire gas when demand is lower."

The price of natural gas and electricity in the Midwest this winter is expected to rise 10.9 percent and 2.4 percent respectively, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Most Washtenaw County residents receive their electricity and gas from DTE Energy, which has 2.2 million electric customers in Southeast Michigan and 1.3 million gas customers throughout the state.

Residents in Dexter, Salem Township and Northville Township who rely on Consumers Energy for their gas and electric also are in luck.

"We expect gas prices to be about the same as last year," said Mary Gust, company spokeswoman. "Our customers are very fortunate because we do have the benefit of storage. We have 15 underground storage fields throughout the state, and that protects customers from price spikes on the market."

The average monthly residential bill for customers is expected to be about \$153, Gust said.

Ann Arbor residents say they often take measures to keep their heating bills low as the winter months approach.

"I am concerned about the (heating) bill because our house is good-sized. It makes me nervous," said Julie Rabinovitz, of Ann Arbor.

To reduce costs, Rabinovitz said she and her husband plan to wear warmer clothing at home and prevent drafts by sealing window and door cracks.

Bloomer said he has also taken measures, replacing his home's windows and doors, to try to keep heating costs low.

Although not all heating costs will increase, Michigan's struggling economy means heating bills will nonetheless be a challenge for some customers, particularly senior citizens and customers with limited incomes, Simons said.

Neighborhood Senior Services - with support from the Area Agency on Aging, the city of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County and Washtenaw United Way - helps county residents 60 and older prepare their homes for the winter season. To do that, they cover air conditioners, put plastic on windows, weatherstripping on doors and windows, and caulking around windows.

NSS has a partnership with Local 190 mechanical service contractors, and volunteer contractors provide free furnace checks and make minor repairs for several low-income and disabled clients every fall. NSS social work staff members also help clients faced with shut-off notices by trying to find resources to help pay past due bills, making payment arrangements, enrolling in shut-off protection and budget plans, and talking with family members about helping financially.

Last winter, many clients fell behind on other bills, and there was an increase in emergency food deliveries, said Dawn Vogel, director of operations for NSS. She said clients close off parts of their houses, go to bed earlier, and use space heaters to help conserve fuel.

Jo Mathis can be reached at jmathis@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6849.

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Simple steps can help cut household's heating bill

Monday, November 12, 2007

BY JO COLLINS MATHIS

The Ann Arbor News

Home inspector Bobby Frank says there are plenty of simple and inexpensive ways homeowners can get ready for winter and save on home heating costs.

At the top of the list, he says, is sealing gaps in the attic insulation - using caulk, foam, sheet metal or another material.

"Any place there's a gap, there's a lot of air coming through, and that's a very cost-effective way of lowering your bill," he says. "Even if you have a lot of insulation, if you're not sealing gaps, it's the equivalent to wearing a heavy down jacket but not zipping up your zipper. You're still going to be cold. Sealing the house tightly is really the most important thing to do in terms of effectively getting your bills down."

What else can you do?

Frank and DTE Energy offer the following tips:

- Make sure windows are latched. If you have storm windows, make sure they're fully closed.
- Spray a removable sealant around all window edges and where railings meet if it's double-hung. "Especially on old windows, that can really make a difference in holding down the drafts and making a home feel much, much more comfortable," Frank says.
- Consider a water heater blanket. At about \$10, it should eventually pay for itself several times over.
- Clean or replace your furnace's air filters as needed during the winter season.
- If you're buying a new furnace, look for one with 90-plus efficiency, a two-pipe system with sealed combustion, and a variable speed fan with DC motor.
- Make sure you close the damper in your fireplace.
- Make sure the attic is well-ventilated. The temperature in the attic should be as close as possible to the temperature outdoors.
- Schedule a heating system checkup. A qualified heating contractor will make sure your heating system operates efficiently and delivers the maximum energy savings.
- Consider hiring a trained expert to come to the house for a blower door testing, which helps you see where drafts are coming through so you know where to seal. Also, infrared testing shows where there are drafts, where insulation might be missing and where there are gaps.
- Add insulation in the attic and basement to keep out drafts. In general, cellulose insulation is a better quality than fiberglass.
- Consider lowering your thermostat. For every degree lower, you can save about 3 percent on your heating bill.

- Use an automatic setback or programmable thermostat, which can automatically lower the temperature when you're away from the house and automatically increase it before you get home.
- Homes with proper humidity levels will provide greater comfort at lower temperatures. When humidity is kept at a proper level - about 35 percent at 70 degrees - windows will not sweat, and the air won't feel dry.
- Clean and vacuum ducts, vents and heat registers. Check heat registers to ensure that drapes or furniture do not block airflow.
- Use kitchen, bath and other ventilating fans wisely. In one hour, those fans can pull warm air out of a whole house. Turn fans off as soon as they have done their job.
- Open curtains on windows facing south during the day to allow sunlight to naturally heat your home. Be sure to close the curtains at night to reduce the chill you may feel from cold windows.

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Plan shifts from shelter

Homeless would get housing first, then assistance

Saturday, November 10, 2007

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT

The Ann Arbor News

They are men and women, single and married, parents, children, employed, unemployed, veterans, domestic violence survivors. Some are physically or mentally ill.

They are the homeless who live in Washtenaw County, and they are showing up on someone's doorstep at the rate of 40 or 50 a week.

The Washtenaw Housing Alliance, a coalition of the social service agencies that work most closely with the homeless, has a 10-year plan - a "Blueprint to End Homelessness."

WHA is holding a forum Tuesday for community leaders, funders and potential partners about what the group has done, is doing and must do next.

The plan marks a paradigm shift in how homelessness is being addressed here. It shifts emphasis from emergency shelter and food, to permanent housing with supportive services that provide access to job training, education, child care, transportation, counseling, legal assistance, and treatment for substance abuse and mental illness.

It's called "Housing First," and it's one of the tools in the WHA toolbox, says to Alliance executive director Chuck Kieffer. If nothing else, he said, it's cost effective.

Kieffer, former homeless programs and policy administrator for the Michigan State Housing Development Authority, cites homelessness studies in cities across the country.

In every case, he said, cities saw significant drops in emergency medical and police, jail and court costs when homeless residents got housing and support services.

But, said Kieffer, "the story that needs to be told isn't so much a story of the numbers ... as about what we as a community are doing that makes a difference in actually creating housing solutions."

Carole McCabe, director of tenant programs at Avalon Housing, has been doing that for 15 years. For her, it's simple.

"Supportive housing is the key to ending homelessness," she said.

"Housing is a basic human right, and if you don't have it, you can't work on the other challenges people face," she said.

Gary Bell, executive director of SOS Community Services, was in the unique position this year of selling the agency's family shelter, several houses in Ypsilanti known collectively as Prospect Place, to raise money to support families in five scattered, semipermanent apartments.

The agency also has 16 families in a two-year stabilization program and is working on placing 27 families in permanent, supported housing.

"The trick of this is to understand that traditional sheltering perpetuates homelessness," Bell said.

"While people are in shelters, they are still experiencing the uncertainty of homelessness, and an inability to make decisions about their own lives. People with stable housing are much more able to address the other issues in their lives that caused the housing instability in the first place."

Besides Housing First, the tools in the WHA toolbox include a single funding pot for most local housing programs, in place of what was a highly competitive arena. WHA members and board of directors decide how the money should be used and then - this is the tough part - by whom.

As WHA continues to add housing for the homeless, with about 166 units either available or on the boards, Kieffer said "we are feeling like we actually can get this job done."

Susan Oppat can be reached at soppat@annarbornews.com or at 734-482-1166.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Homelessness in Washtenaw County

Saturday, November 10, 2007

Chronically homeless people are defined by the federal government as adults who have been homeless for a year or four times in the past three years. National studies indicate 10 percent of all homeless people are chronically homeless - and use 50 percent of the resources allocated to address homelessness and its results.

Of the chronically homeless in Washtenaw County:

- 8 percent are military veterans.
- 20 percent are survivors of domestic violence.
- 37 percent have long-term physical and/or mental disabilities.
- 32 percent are employed.

Cost of homelessness

- \$94 a day: Lodging at the county jail for homeless individuals arrested for committing a crime stemming from homelessness.
- \$66 a day: Delonis Center shelter for a single adult.
- \$96 a day: Incarceration at a state prison, or \$123 a day for a mentally ill inmate.
- \$31.50 a day: Permanent housing and supportive services to keep an adult housed.

Sources: Washtenaw Housing Alliance, Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

History of Washtenaw Housing Alliance

Saturday, November 10, 2007

1998: Local social service agencies that deal most with the homeless form a coalition to create a coordinated response to homelessness.

2001: With support from St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, the Interfaith Hospitality Network opens Alpha House, a shelter for homeless families who had been shuttled between hosting churches.

2003: The \$8.7 million Delonis Center shelter for single adults opens with support from the county and Ann Arbor, and through fundraising. The shelter offers programming to help people break the cycle of homelessness.

2003: WHA creates a 10-year Blueprint to End Homelessness calling for the creation of 500 units of housing for the homeless, with services, including counseling, job training, child care, health and transportation access, education, and substance abuse and mental illness treatment.

2003: Avalon Housing and Food Gatherers get unanimous Ann Arbor City Council vote to create new housing with supportive services, and build a new food warehouse.

2005: Avalon opens 30 new housing units. Fifteenth District Court in Ann Arbor opens a street outreach court.

2006: WHA obtains a \$1.4 million government grant to develop permanent housing with supportive services, as part of the "Housing First" model, in which homeless people who would have languished in shelters for 30-90 days before they got a place to live, are placed immediately in real housing. From there, they get services to stabilize their living conditions.

2007: WHA partners now include: Avalon Housing, Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw County, Food Gatherers, Interfaith Hospitality Network, Ozone House, SafeHouse Center, Saint Joseph Mercy Health System, The Shelter Association of Washtenaw County, SOS Community Services, Synod Residential Services.

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— THE — ANN ARBOR NEWS

Woman rebuilds life and home

She credits programs at shelter with helping end downward spiral

Saturday, November 10, 2007

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT

The Ann Arbor News

Paula Anderson keeps a small but immaculate apartment in Ann Arbor in the midst of a community of friends.

She keeps eclectic collections - University of Michigan sports memorabilia, angels and stuffed animals that fill a bunk bed in precise rows, NASCAR items lionizing her favorite racecar driver, Jeff Gordon.

Family photos are displayed on the wall over the sofa, including a glamour shot of Anderson with her ex-husband and two young daughters, Christian, now 18, who lives with her aunt, and Tiffini, 17.

Not much, perhaps, by many standards.

For Anderson, it's everything, and more than she could have dreamed of for most of the three years she lived in homeless shelters after she lost custody of her children in 2000 during a divorce caused in part by her drinking.

"I hated it," she says of life in the Delonis Center, an \$8.7 million shelter that opened three years ago in Ann Arbor.

Now, the 50-year-old Anderson has lived in one of about 40 Avalon Housing apartments at Arbordale Apartments for four years.

As much as she disliked living at Delonis, she credits social programs there with helping her understand she could change her life, and getting her into Avalon Housing.

"I don't ever give up," Anderson, a tiny woman, says with a jutting jaw.

Tired of living in shelters where she had no control over whom she lived with, what and when she ate, and myriad other day-to-day choices most people take for granted, Anderson quit drinking in 2003. Now on disability for a medical condition, she still gets support services from Avalon Housing.

Anderson has regained custody of her younger daughter and after three years together, "you don't catch us apart," she says.

Anderson still considers herself a member of the homeless community, because her friends are. She's watched many go into rehab again and again, backslide and land back in shelters or in tents.

The latter makes her shudder.

"We lose four or five a year," she says, sadly. She means the homeless who die of cold, because they can't drink in the shelters.

She also keeps most of the past in the past, because she knows only too well what she can lose.

"I have missed so many years of (my daughters') lives. I wish I knew how to make it up to them," she says.

Now, she looks around at the home that Paula built, with a little help.

"I can finally say, 'I did this. This is mine. I have a home.'"

Susan Oppat can be reached at soppat@annarbornews.com or at 734-482-1166.

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A FEW MINUTES WITH ...

A woman who lived homeless

November 11, 2007

BY JIM SCHAEFER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

She read a book called "Bearing Witness," and then Jeanie Murphy was sleeping on the streets of Detroit.

To her, that was a good thing.

Advertisement

Murphy, 43, of Hazel Park considers herself a woman of faith, and "Bearing Witness" spoke to her spiritually about experiencing society's problems firsthand.

So last month, she and 12 other like-minded souls -- including an elementary school teacher, a nurse, a massage therapist and a couple of Buddhist senseis -- set out to spend three nights and four days on the streets.

They ate in soup kitchens, slept on the ground, walked and talked to anyone who'd listen. Now Murphy's looking to do it again. She's hoping for another "street retreat," as she calls it, next spring.

QUESTION: What was the purpose?

ANSWER: For me personally, it was to ... help the haves and the have-nots understand one another better.

Q: What was the reaction of the homeless people that you talked to?

A: 85% of my experience was, "Wow, that's very cool" ... or, "Be careful."

Q: Did any of them look at you and ask, "Are you crazy?"

A: Yeah, definitely. ... "For real? Are you FOR REAL?"

Q: At the beginning, were there plans on where you would eat dinner, where you'd sleep or were you just totally winging it?

A: If we plan it, then it turns into a tour.

Q: Did you bring any modern amenities?

A: No watches. No cell phones. We had to be unplugged from technology.

Q: Did anyone hassle you?

A: No, not really. Actually, we found just the opposite. ... When you tell people what you're doing, they're wonderful, including the homeless people. ...

The last night, we slept in Hart Plaza. ... There were a few people that came in late, on drugs, you know, shaking. ... But it was a wonderful, wonderful place to hear stories. ...

It's inexcusable in our society. I mean, if you're on drugs or something, yeah, I understand.

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A FEW MINUTES WITH A woman who lived homeless

But there are people that are doing good things, the shelters are too full and they're sleeping in Hart Plaza because there's no place else to sleep.

Q: What did you wear?

A: I wore, like, a nylon suit at night. Like an old running suit ... blue jeans, three layers on top.

Q: Did you have enough to eat?

A: Yes. ... The two biggest fears are assault and hunger. And bathrooms. And the only one of those three that's realized are the bathrooms. It's dehumanizing and it can be shameful to have to go to the bathroom and not have any place to be able to go but behind a bush or whatever.

Q: And you had to do that?

A: I had to do that twice. Once with toilet paper and once without. (Laughs.) It was really, really awful.

Q: What was the worst thing you ate?

A: Just bad coffee. ... It's really weak ... in the soup kitchen.

Q: What were the places you slept at each night?

A: Near a parking lot in midtown, Pilgrim church in their gym and Hart Plaza.

Q: How did those 43-year-old bones feel after sleeping on the ground?

A: (Laughs.) They were OK. To be honest, they would have been more comfortable had they not been all tensed up because I was cold. We were all so cold that night.

Q: What did you learn?

A: Seeing physically handicapped people sleeping on the streets -- and feeling that was an inexcusable, societal sin.

Q: What about those of us who blow past homeless people, ignore them or say, "Why don't you get a job?"

A: I would say ... my dad taught me the way to go about getting a job ... showed me a bank account ... put into us the importance of a college education. And my mom supported me, too.

But I just think that, in my particular case, that's kind of my mantra: "They didn't have my father." And I think that that is not an excuse, but for me, it's a significant point of explanation.

Q: Why should we care?

A: My faith informs me that I have a responsibility for humanity. ... It's an economic issue, as well. If you want a decent economy, then why are you not looking at some systemic solutions to this?

Q: What did you learn about homeless people?

A: I learned more about myself. That's another huge piece of this retreat. ... You learn also a great deal about yourself.

*For information on the street retreat, e-mail detroitstreetretreat@yahoo.com. Contact **JIM SCHAEFER** at jschaefer@freepress.com.*

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Homeless mom humbled by donations for triplets

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

By Tom Rademacher

The Grand Rapids Press

MIDDLEVILLE -- Daunting odds require extraordinary efforts.

And in the community coming together to help Monica Roberts -- a broke, homeless woman living in a Barry County shelter with triplets -- generosity apparently knows no boundaries.

In Charlotte, a church dug deep to double its typical Sunday offering.

Invitations to take in the 33-year-old mother and her babies have come from people with room to spare in Holland, Lansing, Allendale Township, Kalamazoo and beyond.

And the director of the shelter where Roberts is staying with her mother and her triplets says that while cash donations are still welcome to a fund established at a Hastings bank, the babies have virtually everything they need for now.

"We have received hundreds of calls," said Janie Bergeron, who directs Green Gables Haven, where Roberts is staying. Bergeron, in fact, begged those trying to get through by phone to be patient, as her staff works overtime this week to return messages.

"There are literally hundreds of people we're trying to call back," Bergeron said.

On Monday, the babies celebrated their one-month birthday with a trip to Middleville physician Dr. Christopher Noah, who treated all three for cold symptoms.

Noah said Roberts "definitely blew away the image" he imagined would walk through his door when he was told a homeless mother with triplets was coming in for her first appointment.

"You think it's going to be someone out of control, and she is definitely in control," he said. "She seems mature, caring -- almost unflustered. Just composed."

Roberts, who lost her job and ran up debt, has said the babies were conceived after she met a man at a tavern. She said she has not had contact with the father in about six months, after she told him she was expecting triplets. She did not come forward seeking help; her story initially was told in The Press after her obstetrician learned she and the triplets were in the homeless shelter.

The response has been overwhelming, with staff at the shelter helping sort it out.

With plenty of supplies on hand, Bergeron emphasized that still up in the air are cash needs and a permanent residence for the foursome, something they are carefully considering with regard to the distance that the mother would be from her 13-year-old son, who lives in Barry County with his father.

A man in Allendale offered an apartment and all utilities free of charge. Other offers -- some of complete apartments and others that require she share space -- have come from six counties.

At St. Mary Catholic Church in Charlotte, the Rev. Denis Spitzley held up a column he clipped from The Press and implored those attending three weekend Masses to consider donating to a special offering for Roberts.

He then positioned himself at a church exit for the Saturday afternoon and two Sunday services, and collected \$2,059 more than \$2,000 or so people typically bring to the altar in a weekend, said Hope Steele, a secretary at the parish of about 400 families.

Steele, who was at one of the Masses, said Spitzley "held the article up, and said that this was a woman of faith, and maybe we could help her out."

Roberts said Monday afternoon that she is "overwhelmed" by the outpouring. "I never expected this to happen," she said. "I can't even express how much people are willing to do for us.

"I just hope that the story can do something to help others" in similar situations.

"I'd forgotten," she said, "how nice the world can be."

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Homeless vet: 'Someone's got to clean this up'

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

By Ted Roelofs

The Grand Rapids Press

Vietnam War veteran Kirk Henry is the first to admit his life has been a mess.

About a year ago, he said, he began receiving military disability payments after he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. A few months later, he got a letter informing him they would stop because he missed a meeting with his probation officer.

That's when he lost his Grand Rapids apartment and took refuge in the Guiding Light Mission.

"Someone's got to clean this up," said Henry, 55, who is hoping a free mobile legal clinic today in Grand Rapids for low-income veterans can help.

The clinic, funded by a \$200,000 state grant, is the first stop in a statewide tour by University of Detroit Mercy School of Law volunteer attorneys and law students. Other stops are scheduled for Flint, Lansing, Benton Harbor, Pontiac and Battle Creek.

With veterans making up about one-fourth of the nation's homeless, advocates say free legal help is a good start on a much broader problem.

"They seem to be disproportionately represented among the homeless population," said Larry Mulligan, a Grand Rapids lawyer who has donated legal help to veterans for several years.

But there is evidence Michigan isn't doing all it can for its veterans.

According to a 2004 master's thesis submitted to Harvard University, the state lags much of the nation in several categories. Michigan stands 44th among states in federal health care spending per veteran and 47th in disability compensation, according to the information.

The U.S. Government Reform committee found Michigan veterans wait 206 days for a decision on disability claims, compared to a national average of 177.

To speed that along, the Detroit Mercy School of Law's 27-foot recreational vehicle was to be parked at the Health Care for Homeless Veterans, 349 South Division Ave., and at the Guiding Light Mission, 255 South Division Ave.

Dick McDonald, a case manager for Health Care for Homeless Veterans, said some veterans grapple with everything from unemployment to substance abuse to psychological trauma, such as post traumatic stress disorder.

He said a legal advocate can help a veteran navigate disability claims for which the waiting period can extend beyond a year.

Others may be stymied by Friend of the Court obligations that make it difficult for them to afford housing.

"Some of these guys get jobs but they can't afford a place to live. A lot of them have trouble with driver's licenses.

"If you don't have a driver's license, it's pretty hard to get a job."

Vietnam veteran Henry served three years in the Air Force, including duty in 1971 and 1972 at a hospital in Camron Bay. Part of his job: Transfer the bodies of Viet Cong and U.S. soldiers into body bags.

"I knew it was my job, and I did it," Henry said.

Henry doesn't blame that experience for his troubles, which include periodic homelessness and a long-term battle with alcohol abuse.

"I just can't keep a job," Henry said.

The Veterans Administration estimates there are nearly 200,000 homeless veterans on a given night.

Experts say it can be several years after military service before the accumulation of issues push a veteran into life on the streets. Some think the Iraq war -- with its roadside bombs, severe brain injuries and blurred combat lines -- could be especially tough for returning soldiers.

"It's only going to grow," said volunteer lawyer Mulligan. "This war, I think, is going to be unbelievably devastating to many of the soldiers who come back."

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Detroit Free Press Editorial

November 10, 2007

No vet should be homeless

Michigan has been getting a taste of the winter to come this week, and no one feels it more quickly than the homeless. Sunday is Veterans Day. What's the connection? Well a new report released Thursday shows that about 25% of the nation's homeless people are military veterans, although vets make up only about 11% of the population. The National Alliance to End Homelessness, a nonprofit education group, says the number of homeless vets rose nearly 13% last year as troubled returnees from Iraq and Afghanistan joined the ranks of "street people." While Michigan officials say less than 1% of the state's 780,000 veterans are homeless, the national numbers clearly reflect human needs not being met for people who deserve better.



Never too busy to CARE

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

A group that helps the needy turns 20, and as the holidays approach, it's still making sure the needy get help.

TAMAR RANKINS

THE SAGINAW NEWS

This year marks CARE's 20th year of service to the needy, but organizers say they're too busy to celebrate.

That's because Thanksgiving and Christmas are approaching, and the organization is seeking recipients for holiday aid.

"We really haven't planned anything for ourselves; this time of the year is really busy," said Chris Putnam, CARE coordinator and community education director for Birch Run Area Schools.

"We want to make sure that everyone is taking care of."

Birch Run-Taymouth CARE is a nonprofit that collects food and gift donations year-round and distributes them to residents in need during Thanksgiving and Christmas. Food donations feed participants for a week or longer. The group also distributes donated toys and wrapped gifts.

Applicants who request assistance must document income and family size. CARE typically helps the elderly, handicapped and families. The group cross-references applications with other agencies to qualify applicants who don't receive assistance from other services.

"CARE started when community churches realized there was a need. They realized that pooling resources could give them a better chance to meet the need. I felt pretty blessed to be a part of CARE," said Bob Cassiday of Fremont Township, former Care chairman.

CARE serves at least 100 families during Christmas and 25 families for Thanksgiving each year. But the holidays aren't the only time when CARE lends a helping hand. Throughout the year, it helps about 200 families.

"We even help people when the holidays are over. We don't turn people away. Without the generosity of the people in our community, CARE would not be able to provide the necessary help to families in need," Putnam said. "We accommodate people and always have more than enough."

The Thanksgiving CARE event is set for 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 20, in the cafeteria at Greene Middle School, 8225 Main. Christmas CARE is from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 22, in the cafeteria at North Elementary School, 12440 Church. Gifts are at Kid's Kourt Child Care Center, 12400 Church.

Applicants may turn in requests at the Birch Run Community Education Office, 12400 Church; at any Birch Run school building; the Taymouth Township Hall, 4343 E. Birch Run; Fleschner Memorial Library, 11935 Silver Creek; or send mail to Care, Chris Putnam, 12400 Church, Birch Run, MI 48415.

Residents may send food, gifts or money to Kid's Kourt Child Care Center, 12400 Church. Organizers are looking for gift cards for 16- to 18-year-olds and toiletries. For more information, call Putnam at 624-6229. v

Tamar Rankins is a staff writer at The Saginaw News. Call her at 776-9724.



THE BAY CITY TIMES

Demand for coats shows no dropoff

Monday, November 12, 2007

By Amy Jo Johnson

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Think times aren't tough in Michigan? Volunteer to distribute Coats for Kids and you'll think otherwise, says Carrie Dahlberg, director of Just for Kids, a program to help underprivileged children in Bay County.

"They come in with no coat. Or a spring coat. They wear flip-flops. ... You can tell they don't have anything," she said.

October was the cutoff for coat applications, but requests for coats still are coming in.

"It's been busy," Dahlberg said. "We have given out about 700 coats so far."

Sunday was the last distribution day for new coats and, Dahlberg said, "We're estimating we will have given out between 750 and 800 coats."

Used coats still are being accepted and distributed to those in need.

Last year was the first time Coats for Kids in Bay County handed out only brand-new coats to children from birth to age 12.

"That's just what makes our program a little bit different," Dahlberg said.

Dahlberg, who volunteered with the Coats for Kids program when it was still under the nonprofit umbrella of Created for Caring, remembers how children used to come in and be handed a coat already selected for them.

This year, families stopped by a temporary Wilder Road shop to pick out their own coat. Dahlberg called it "just like shopping."

"They love the idea of picking (a coat) out themselves. It's not the hand-out type procedure at all."

Besides a coat, each child also got a set of mittens and a hat, which were donated by schools, church groups and other organizations. Coats for Kids reserves its resources strictly for coat purchases.

Although the new-coat phase of the campaign is over, used coats can be dropped off into one of the Coats for Kids drop boxes.

Drop boxes are located at The Cat's Meow, Pine Road and Center Avenue; Graff Chevrolet on Wilder Road; and Maier & Associates Financial Group Inc., 5982 West Side Saginaw Road.

Dahlberg said used coats are given to Do-All, which gets them out to kids who need them.

"There still is a need. With the late applications, we're still looking at a need of 200 coats," she said.

New coats still will be accepted, and will be used in next year's campaign. Coats for Kids stocks coats for children from infancy to age 12, but the most popular sizes are 5-6 to 14-16.

"Those are the ones that we run out of like the first week of the program," Dahlberg said. "That's where the

cash donations come in."

Donations - in the form of new coats or cash - that are not used this year are simply applied to next year's coat distribution. Dahlberg said monetary donations are always nice because they allow volunteers to purchase what's needed, when it's needed.

Dahlberg said she stretches cash donations by shopping clearance sales early in the year.

"I wait until probably about February and go raid the stores," she said.

Mail donations of money to Coats for Kids, P.O. Box 1786, Bay City, 48706.

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Church expands blanket giveaway in second year

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

By Fredricka Paul

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Last year members of Calvary Apostolic Church handed out more than 110 blankets to warm needy people.

This year they are aiming for 500.

"We are looking to blanket Jackson County with warmth," said Angelic Sponaugle, who organizes the Cup of Joe and a Blanket To Go program. "We saw such a great need and we didn't come near the need that was out there. We just felt like we needed to do it again."

Pickup begins at 10 a.m. Jan. 19 at the Jackson Interfaith Shelter, 414 S. Blackstone St.

The group is hoping to expand its second annual event to two pickup locations, but a second spot has yet to be chosen to go along with the shelter, Sponaugle said. So far the group has collected 50 blankets.

"We are looking for the support of the community to help us," she said. "It seems like people want to give and they want to help, but they don't know how. We feel like it is a wonderful way for folks to reach out to their community."

The Rev. William Scott, pastor of the church, said he's been touched to see volunteers sacrifice their own hats, gloves and socks to help others.

"It is not about us," Scott said. "It is about reaching out and touching people. Especially with the economy today."

"It seems Jackson has been hit pretty hard."

Church members are looking for blankets, coats, hats and gloves -- whatever people are willing to donate to help warm people, Sponaugle said. They would also like to see people volunteer to pass out coffee and donated items.

Starbucks is providing the coffee again this year, Sponaugle said.

The Salvation Army and local motels have gotten on board to donate blankets, she said.

This year, Sponaugle hopes to show the church's appreciation to people who donate and participate by holding a free dinner at the church featuring a slide show of the event so people can see what happened to their blankets.

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Lansing State Journal Editorial

November 10, 2007

Kudos on bill to block MSP building

Rep. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge, and Sen. Cameron Brown, R-Sturgis, may be taking the Don Quixote approach to fighting the new State Police Headquarters Building in downtown Lansing, but they're right.

In the face of the state's ongoing struggle over how to change the tax structure and the dire need to rethink Michigan's approach to spending, the very idea of a \$45 million office building to replace one that is leased for \$1 a year remains shocking.

Of course it's not that simple. The state would have to put significant money into needed improvements at the current building, which is leased from Michigan State University in East Lansing.

Still, the new building slid right through the approval process even as Michigan lawmakers were bemoaning the various financial emergencies faced by the state. It was a stunning development that still has taxpayers shocked about the wasteful and potentially unnecessary spending.

The proposed site, a riverfront property at Grand Avenue and Kalamazoo Street, also is an unfortunate choice for what by its nature must be a high-security structure.

The bill from Jones and Brown would stop the state from spending money on the building. It's unlikely to pass. And that's too bad, because this remains a project that is in the wrong location for Lansing and comes at the wrong time for Michigan.